

The President's Daily Brief

19 December 1973

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

December 19, 1973

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Syria's refusal to attend the Geneva Middle East peace conference which begins Friday heightens chances for renewed hostilities on the Golan front. Egypt's reaction, however, seems to hold out some possibility that Syria may be persuaded to attend if early progress is made. [redacted]

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[redacted] Egyptian nervousness over possible Israeli air raids. (Page 1)

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Hijackers of the Lufthansa aircraft from Rome may be members of the dissident Fatah - Black September group based in Tripoli. (Page 2)

The opening round of negotiations on force reductions in Europe was largely a probing exercise that indicated areas of conflict and potential compromise. (Page 3)

Soyuz 13, launched yesterday with two cosmonauts aboard, appears to be operating normally. (Page 4)

Notes on cutbacks of Arab oil to Caribbean refineries and Denmark's new minority government appear on Page 5.

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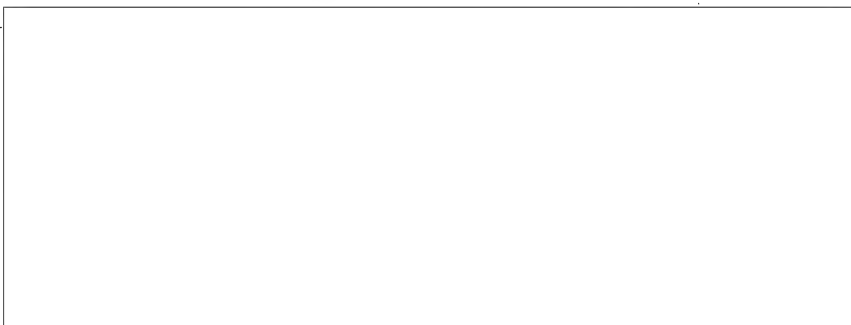
ARAB STATES - ISRAEL

Syria's announcement yesterday that it would not participate in the Geneva conference which begins Friday reflects the ingrained convictions of some Syrian leaders that productive negotiations with Israel are still not possible.

By casting doubt on prospects for quickly attaining Arab goals through negotiation, the announcement heightens chances for renewed hostilities on the Golan front, where Syrian forces were alerted and reinforced last week. Moreover, the recent Egyptian military buildup and positioning of air force units suggest the possibility of Egypt and Syria advancing their timetable for applying military pressure on Israel to withdraw from Arab territory.

Official Egyptian reaction to Syria's decision still held out hope that the Syrians could be persuaded to attend the conference if early progress were made. Cairo's statement expressed understanding of the "fear and suspicion that have forced" Syria not to attend the conference. However, it emphasized that significant progress during the early meetings could open the way for Syria and other Arabs to contribute positively to the peace effort. But, Cairo warned, Israeli stalling would force the Arabs to resume the armed struggle.

According to press reports from Geneva, Israeli officials reaffirmed Israel's agreement to attend the conference, despite the Syrian decision.



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Despite Egyptian nervousness, few cease-fire violations were noted yesterday. UN observers reported antiaircraft fire near Fayid on the west bank of the Great Bitter Lake, and several heavy explosions were heard north of Suez City. According to Jerusalem Domestic Service, no cease-fire violations occurred on the Syrian front.

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FEDAYEEN

The hijackers of the Lufthansa aircraft from Rome airport are apparently members of a dissident Fatah - Black September group based in Tripoli, Libya. The group is headed by Ahmad Abd al-Ghaffur, a Fatah member but a critic of Fatah chief Yasir Arafat. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] there is no indication of Libyan complicity in this operation.

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The hijackers' demand for the release by the Greek Government of two imprisoned Palestinians who staged a terrorist attack at Athens airport last August suggests that the hijackers were operating under the guidance of Abd al-Ghaffur, who is thought to have planned and supervised the Athens incident. Prior to that incident Abd al-Ghaffur was said to be planning attacks for both Rome and Athens. [REDACTED]

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A principal purpose of the current hijacking apparently was to disrupt the peace conference in Geneva. Abd al-Ghaffur in early 1973 was said to have agreed to coordinate his operations with officials of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, whose head, George Habbash, has publicly opposed participation by the Palestine Liberation Organization in the conference. [REDACTED]

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USSR

Soyuz 13, launched yesterday from Tyuratam with two cosmonauts aboard, appears to be operating normally.

The Soviet manned space program has been plagued by a variety of problems which could affect the joint Apollo-Soyuz mission scheduled for 1975. One objective of the current flight may be to test new components added to the spacecraft for this joint mission.

The orbits of Soyuz 13 and Cosmos 613, an unmanned spacecraft launched earlier, are significantly different, indicating that no rendezvous or docking operations are planned.

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NOTES

Caribbean Oil: The embargo of crude oil by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to all major refineries in the Caribbean, Libya's cutback on shipments to some refineries, and Libya's embargo to the one in the Virgin Islands--all effective in early November--stand to reduce the inflow of Arab crude to the area by about 80 percent. Heretofore, about 25 percent of the Caribbean's supply of crude oil has come from these three countries. Output of the Caribbean refineries is now beginning to reflect these cutbacks. US imports of petroleum products from the Caribbean, which amounted to 1.3 million barrels per day during the first six months of 1973, may soon be reduced by as much as 18 percent.

Denmark: The minority government of Moderate Liberal leader Poul Hartling enjoys, at least initially, relatively broad parliamentary approval. Over the longer term, however, support from the fragmented parliament is uncertain. As a result, the government may attempt only moderate domestic reforms aimed at slowing inflation and modifying the tax structure. Little innovation is likely in foreign policy, particularly as regards relations with NATO and the EC.

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